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‘One nation, two languages’: Representations of official languages on multilingual news websites in Belarus

This article analyses how two official languages of Belarus, Russian and Belarusian, are represented on the homepages of two national news websites through the analysis of media discourse within headlines and leads of news stories, and focusing on aspects of multimodality of websites. In view of the equal legal status of these languages, this study investigates the extent to which readers of news in Russian and Belarusian are exposed to different content, and how these differences are connected to existing language ideologies. Critical discourse analysis of textual contents of linguistic versions in combination with multimodal analysis of the websites’ layout revealed that Russian and Belarusian tend to be used differently in news on politics, culture and sports and, hence, are represented as having different values. More specifically, the media examined here present the same stories from different ideological perspectives and websites’ thematic sections include different news depending on the language of the webpage. This study demonstrated that multilingual websites represent a useful source of data for the study of language ideologies in the media. The methodological approach employed here can be replicated in other contexts characterised by bilingualism and diglossia (Fishman 1967) linguistic situations.

Keywords: representations, language ideologies, diglossia, Belarus

Introduction

The ability of media to construct social reality has been widely examined in academic research (Tuchman 1978; Bell 1991; Richardson 2007; Davies 2012; Fowler 2013; Hartley 2013) and media outputs represent one of the main sources of data in discourse analysis. Across disciplines, it is common to resort to analysis of news reporting in studies of different ideologies. The study of language is one of them, and the issue of media representations of languages and multilingualism is well established in academic research (Johnson and Milani 2010; Kelly-Holmes and Milani 2011; Johnson and Ensslin 2007; Johnson, Milani, and Upton 2007; Vessey 2016; Jaworska and

Themistocleous 2017).

It is of interest to this study to add to the existing field of research and investigate if languages can become ideological markers in news reporting; that is, if the language has effects on what news stories are chosen for publication and how this affects the angle of presentation of news. This question arises from the clear distinction in value attributed to the two official languages of Belarus, Russian and Belarusian, both employed by the media.

This distinction exists in Belarus due to a long-established state of *bilingualism and diglossia*, Fishman's (1967) term employed for linguistic contexts where members of speech communities are bilingual and fulfil social roles that require different languages. This may result in that 'separate languages or varieties would be(come) superfluous' and 'one language (or variety) would displace the other as role and value distinctions merged and became blurred' (Fishman 1967, 32). In Belarus, it is Russian that dominates whilst Belarusian appears redundant. Nevertheless, both Russian and Belarusian enjoy the same constitutional status (National Centre for Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus 1998). Belarusian was proclaimed the only official language in 1991 but this changed when Russian became second official after 1995 referendum on the official status of Russian, a new national flag and emblem, and economic integration with Russia. As a result of this consultation, Russian and Belarusian were granted equal status, but this is not reflected in the actual use of languages, neither on the governmental level nor in the daily practices of speakers. Pavlenko (2006) describes linguistic legislation in Belarus as a '*dual-language policy with Russian functioning de facto as the main language*' (2006, 84).

After years of russification of Belarus under the rule of the Russian Empire and the USSR, it is not surprising that Russian became the language of education, media and

law, whilst Belarusian has only been maintained in a few domains. At present, the linguistic situation in Belarus is characterised by a progressive shift towards monolingualism in Russian in view of laissez faire linguistic policies and the neglect of Belarusian by the authorities in Belarus under President Lukashenka's government (Skobla 2000; Pavlenko 2006; Woolhiser 2007; 2011; Bekus 2010). These circumstances led to the formation of a system of language ideologies around Russian and Belarusian that circulate through different channels.

Language ideologies are defined as sets of ideas and beliefs about language (Silverstein 1979) that '*often index the political economic interest of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation-states*' (Kroskrity 2010, 192). Language ideologies also influence access to power; through these sets of ideas, people evaluate languages and their speakers, which contributes towards reinforcing existing language practices and maintaining the established power relations. Language ideologies are embedded in metalinguistic discourse and represent common-sense ideas that also circulate in media explicitly or implicitly. Research has demonstrated that media play a significant role in policing language use, also through spreading language ideologies: they can promote language varieties and even contribute to language shift (Kulyk, 2010; Comeau and King, 2011; Graber, 2012). Language ideologies can influence decision-making around languages, including language choice in the media.

One example of such decision-making in the Belarusian print press is demonstrated in Figure 1, below. Statistical data show that the two official languages of the country have not been used in the same proportions (Belstat 2016); if in 1990 newspapers in Belarusian outnumbered newspapers in Russian (135 and 89 respectively) by 2015 newspapers in Russian doubled the number of those in

Belarusian (400 and 185 respectively). When the print news market is clearly Russian-dominated, no statistics for language use on websites are available.

Digital media differ from the traditional media in their modality; when the choice of language is central to television, radio and newspapers, websites can produce materials in all relevant languages letting readers access the information in their language(s) of preference. Although Corominas Piulats (2007) proposes to account for language policies on the Internet only by examining the absence or presence of varieties, multilingual practices on websites are more complex than maintaining identical language versions. Regarding webpage structure and the way news is communicated to the public, their homepages are scrollable and readers can only see their top section until they scroll down. For this reason, this area of the homepages (top-left, centre-left and centre-centre) is key in a multimodal analysis (Buscher, Cutrell, and Morris 2009). In view of these major differences in their modality and in the ways of using language as contrasted to other media (Androutsopoulos 2009), Belarusian bilingual news websites represent an interesting space of enquiry from the perspective of language ideology and discourse analysis.

In terms of popularity, the Internet and news websites are rapidly acquiring new users in Belarus (Digital Report 2017) with a penetration percentage of about 63% of Belarusians (Internet World Stats 2017). In Belarusian online media, Russian dominates and is followed by Belarusian, English and Polish (The OpenNet Gate Initiative 2010). However, the media have the freedom to choose languages for their activity in Belarus (National Centre for Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus 1998) and users' choices might be limited for what is provided. At the same time, as Kelly-Holmes and Milani (2011) claim, flowing with the language of the majority is also an explicit decision in multilingualism management, and such decision-making can have a

significant impact — especially in contexts characterised by language inequality (Corominas Piulats 2007).

Whilst dominating state-run media, such as television, radio and the press are believed to reinforce the monolingual trend, Internet resources in Belarus represent an unexplored field of enquiry into language use. The Internet became an alternative to traditional news media and their popularity is increasingly growing (The OpenNet Gate Initiative 2010; Internet World Stats 2017).

A substantial body of research has looked into multilingual practices on websites (Johnson, Milani, and Upton 2007; Carroll 2010; Callahan and Herring 2012; Kytölä 2012; Lafkioui 2013; Yanaprasart, Choremi, and Gander 2013) but only one study has so far critically analysed representations of languages on a multilingual website: Abdul-Mageed and Herring (2008) examined English and Arabic versions of Al-Jazeera's website for layout, thematic coverage and ideological perspective in news stories. However, no research has thus far focused on websites whose target audience is composed of nationals of one unevenly bilingual nation-state. If the reporting in Belarusian and Russian presents thematic and ideological differences, it is an indication of news-makers' involvement in construction and reproduction of language ideologies. In view of the research gap identified here, this paper addresses the following research questions:

- How are the official languages of Belarus represented in two news websites?
- Are readers in Belarusian and Russian exposed to different content (news topics, headlines and leads) and layout (above the page fold area) of main pages when reading news websites?
- What ideological stance on Belarusian and Russian languages do these representations suggest?

Language ideologies in Belarus

There is a substantial body of research on language policies and language ideologies in Belarus (Woolhiser 1995, 2007, 2011; Smolicz and Radzik 2004; Brown 2007; Giger and Sloboda 2008; Pavlenko 2008; Bekus 2010). Mainly, language ideologies in Belarus develop around notions of national language and standard language (Woolhiser 2011). Indeed, historically, language was a central issue in the nation-building process in Belarus and the main instrument of this process. In the late 19th century, Old Belarusian language was not deemed appropriate for the purposes of shaping the Belarusian national idea due to its association with higher social classes, so in the spirit of struggle for social equality of the time, it was the folk language that motivated the rise of national awareness (Bekus 2010). This demonstrates the strategic employment of language in the nation-building process and shows how Belarusian played a key role in the political struggle historically.

Until now, the Belarusian language is key in raising national consciousness in the country even though the vast majority speaks Russian in everyday life. From the standpoint of speakers of standard Belarusian, the language also links the nation to its European heritage, unlike Russian that is a product of a colonial past. Results of recent polls demonstrate that this stance is characteristic of the political opposition of Belarus (Generationby 2014). For this reason, the Belarusian language is often perceived as the language of opposition to the government and the choice to speak Belarusian is often interpreted as a demonstration of political affiliation.

Meanwhile, Belarusian represents a symbol of national belonging and unity (Brown 2005), which has been observed in the census data; the vast majority of Belarusian citizens declare Belarusian as their mother tongue, although fewer people claim to speak it at home (Belstat 1999, 2009). To a considerable extent, this

recognition of Belarusian as a native language was established as a result of Soviet census practices where a distinction was made between the mother tongue and the language of daily communication (Kulyk 2011). Despite the limited applicability of Belarusian, it is often referred to as the '*soul of nation*' (Brown 2005, 312) in line with the idea of the unity of a nation around a common language (Goujon 1999), rooted in the nation-state monolingual ideology, the principle of 'one nation – one language'.

In public discourse and educational contexts, the Belarusian language is often labelled as '*valuable*', '*rich*', '*poetic*' and '*emotional*' (Goujon 1999; Brown 2005; Giger and Sloboda 2008), all indicative of positive attitudes towards it but suggesting a sentimental and nostalgic view of the language. Similarly, Belarusian is perceived as the sole marker of national culture, e.g., the domains of literature, theatre, and folk culture are mainly dominated by the Belarusian language, and the 'belarusianness' of art is often disputed if it is done in other languages. A linguistic landscape study by Brown (2007) shows how Belarusian performs this role of cultural and heritage marker. On the other hand, such strong symbolic value of language leads to a perception of its poor practicality and consequent decrease in its use in other public spheres.

Returning to the perceived 'uselessness' of Belarusian, Lych (2000) provides a historical overview of how the idea of inappropriateness of Belarusian for education, science, literary work and religious practices was promoted through covert language policies. This resulted in the formation of the stereotype of the language as 'old-fashioned' and only suitable for rural contexts. Indeed, another persistent belief about Belarusian is in connection with its 'rurality'. In the process of urbanisation, Belarusian remained widespread in rural areas, whilst city dwellers adopted Russian or Polish in different periods of history (Smolicz and Radzik 2004). Then, the idea of Belarusian being spoken by only '*peasants*' (Giger and Sloboda 2008, 317), '*small gentry and a*

few townspeople' (Smolicz and Radzik 2004, 512) persisted. This reinforced beliefs about its uselessness, underdevelopment and unsuitability for a range of activities (Zaprudski, 2007) which can be observed in modern Belarus too.

Evidently, the Belarusian language performs a symbolic rather than an instrumental function in Belarusian society (Giger and Sloboda 2008). Overall, the position of the Belarusian language in present-day Belarus is ambiguous (Zaprudski, 2007; Bekus, 2010) due to its decreased practical use, associations with opposition to the government, lack of state support and some negative attitudes to the language. Historically, Belarusian has been in a subordinate position to Russian for centuries (Zaprudski 2007) similar to other languages spoken in ex-Soviet republics. Nowadays, in view of its reduced use, the language is often referred to as endangered (Brown 2005).

On the other hand, Russian thrives in Belarus; a language spoken by the vast majority, it is the unmarked variety. Unlike Belarusian, Russian does not communicate any political stance and does not usually represent a sign of a pro-Russian political stance of the speaker (Bekus 2010). However, despite the fact that Russian is now spoken as a first language by the majority of the ethnically homogenous population of Belarus, the official status of Russian is still a contested issue (Woolhiser 2011).

Regarding the practicality of Russian, in modern Belarus, it remains the language of prestigious domains, such as science, education, technology and the media, a practice typical of republics of the USSR before its dissolution (Pavlenko 2006). It was also the language of the ruling class and power structures in Soviet times (Lych 2000), which provided it with a prestigious status and encouraged people to shift from Belarusian. In fact, like the Soviet administration, the current government almost exclusively uses Russian to communicate with the public. All of the above indicate that

Russian is the language for communicating state power and performs mainly an instrumental function in Belarusian society, whilst there is little evidence of its symbolic value for Belarusians as a nation.

The arguments presented above demonstrate that the current state of bilingualism in the country is skewed towards monolingualism in Russian following the classic state ideology of 'one nation – one language'. Although no policy favouring Russian exists in Belarus, the government does not intervene in the existing linguistic status quo as no effort is made to provide a balanced use of the two languages in the country; through covert actions (Smolicz and Radzik 2004; Giger and Sloboda 2008) the state creates an unfavourable environment for speakers of Belarusian whilst Russian dominates the public space through implicit language choices of the many.

Data

As the times of interaction of readers with online newspapers are usually short and resemble scanning reading (Knox 2007), it was decided to focus on homepages of news websites as the source of data for this study. Homepages of news websites contain the so-called news-bites which consist of visual and textual signs (Knox 2007). The textual content of news-bites including headlines and leads of stories were the focus of analysis of this study.

Two Belarusian news websites of national coverage, Belaruspartisan.org and Belta.by, were selected for analysis as they contained comparable linguistic versions of the website in Russian and Belarusian. Including a wider range of websites would have been beneficial for this study, however, most news websites in Belarus did not meet this criterion at the time of data collection.

Belta.by is a state-run news website that belongs to the Belarusian Telegraph Agency and has run its news website in four languages since 1999. As indicated on their

website, Belaruspartisan.org is a private online newspaper that started off as a collective effort of independent journalists in 2005 as a response to the government's ban on privately run newspapers.

For data analysis screenshots of the homepages of both websites were collected between June 8th and June 11th, 2015, the time when the study was carried out. The dates were chosen at random and a four-day selection provided the necessary sample of data to get an overview of website practices.

Methodology

As the main purpose of this project was to identify representations of official languages of Belarus in national websites, and due to the nature of the data set, two main methods were applied: (1) multimodal website analysis based on the combination of frameworks offered by Kok (2004) and Knox (2007), and (2) critical discourse analysis (CDA) for headlines and leads of news stories. Critical discourse analysis was central to this study and its findings were complemented by results of multimodal analysis.

Despite the wide critique of CDA in academic literature (Machin and Mayr 2012, 208; Widdowson 2004), this approach helps demonstrate how discourse relates to power and ideologies (Fairclough 2017, 13) which serves the purpose of this study, i.e., to demonstrate how language ideologies are manifested in news reporting through implicit use of different languages.

CDA is used by researchers to critically examine social realities by analysing media texts and helps identify underlying discourses in news beyond linguistic characteristics of the content. As news websites' language is similar to that of print media, analysis of headlines and leads was based on frameworks proposed by Richardson (2007), and Machin and Mayr (2012). These overview linguistic features

that help activate certain discourses in the media and suggest tools to examine news language from a critical perspective.

The first step of the procedure was to identify the differences in layout features of the two websites and the linguistic contents of the 'above the page fold area' (APFA). Next, the analysis focused on the differences in topic-structure across language versions of each website. Finally, significant differences in discursive practices for headlines and leads of each topical section in Russian and Belarusian were approached from a critical discourse analytic perspective.

For evaluation of homepages' layout features, multimodal analysis was applied. Differences in the structure of homepages across linguistic versions were identified as the frameworks by Kok (2004) and Knox (2007) have suggested. Structural elements present and absent in linguistic versions, as well as their position (salience) on the page, were considered. Special attention was given to the APFA and location of topical sections that are marked on the webpage with section headlines.

The following steps were taken to evaluate the ways in which the headlines and leads (where available) represent news stories on websites similarly or differently by language: (1) three components of news stories - actors, processes and circumstances (Richardson 2007; Bax 2011; Machin and Mayr 2012); (2) identifying linguistic devices used to present stories and their discursive effects; (3) comparing unique headlines in different language versions (topics and three components of news stories).

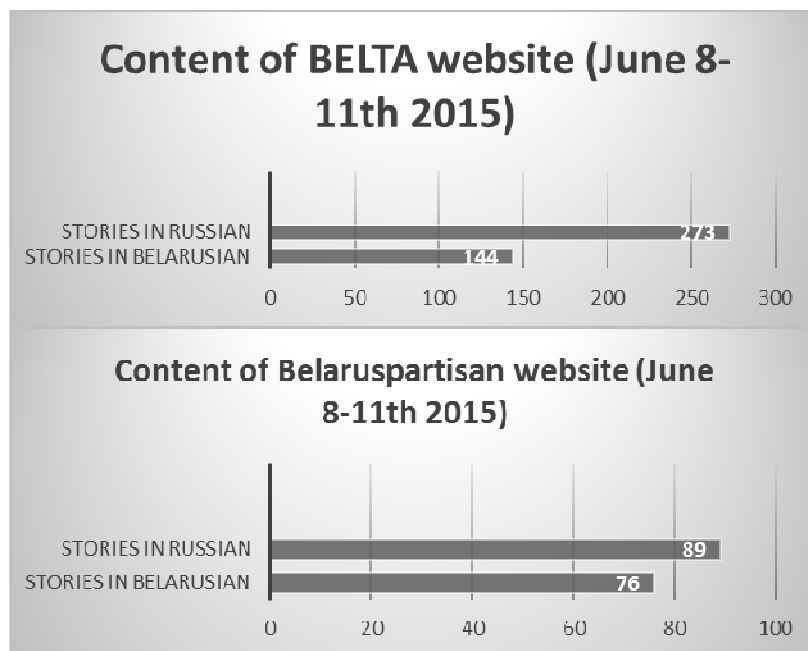
Due to limited space, this paper reports on the results of contrastive critical discourse analysis of headlines and leads of language versions of each website. Textual data were analysed in the original languages but, for clarity, are presented along with its translations into English. The data were translated by the author.

Analysis

The aim of this study was to find and explain representations of Belarusian and Russian as constructed through the layout of websites' linguistic versions and the use of languages to deliver similar and different news. At all levels of analysis and in the case of both news websites, Belarusian and Russian are neither treated in an equal manner nor are they represented similarly.

Firstly, Russian is quantitatively more present in both studied websites: the number of articles and the range of topical sections offered to the reader in Russian is greater than that of Belarusian. Figure 1 shows the overall number of stories that were published on each website at the time of data collection. On state-run Belta.by, the number of articles in Russian is almost double that of the number of articles in Belarusian, whilst on private Belaruspatriot.org the number of articles in both languages is almost equal, with Russian only exceeding Belarusian by 15%. Overall, this finding suggests a greater practicality of Russian compared to Belarusian, which goes in hand with results of Brown's (2005) study and demonstrates a certain grade of functional superiority in line with Korth's (2005) research. This may be explained by the fact that newsmakers are market-driven and might expect more Russian-speaking readers.

Figure 1. Number of headlines in Russian and Belarusian



Furthermore, the findings of this study suggested that websites' language choice and writing practices fall into the pattern of language policies in their broader sense; that is, language policy defined here as a combination of linguistic ideologies and the actual use of languages by their speakers, but not limited to written language regulations. Indeed, more effort is in place to produce websites in Russian, the language of wider use.

On the level of multimodal analysis, as anticipated, the layout and content of the APFA differ for Belarusian and Russian versions of both websites. Russian versions of both websites provide more visual support and interactive elements than Belarusian versions. This makes them more user-friendly and attractive (Roth et al. 2013; Pan et al. 2004). However, the most significant differences in representation lie in discourse, rhetoric and choice of news reported in each language.

Languages in politics

Analysis of headlines and leads of both websites demonstrates that the Belarusian language represents a highly politicised variety. A close look at Belta.by main news

revealed assumptions about readers in Belarusian: they do not support the government and are against state ideology in the eyes of this state-run newsmaker. Russian is a more neutral variety in the political news but does hold a closer link to Russia, CIS and the USSR in reporting on both websites than the Belarusian language does.

One example of this is the headline and lead presented in Table 1. The Belarusian headline is more ideologically and politically charged as it contains multiple actors (Lukashenka, media forum, countries vs. media forum only in the Russian version) (Richardson, 2007). In addition, the lead in Belarusian gives the event's background where the state position on the purposes of media forum is stated. The lead focuses on the '*Great Victory*' celebrations and the necessity to avoid '*falsifications and revisions*' (evaluative language) of '*our common history*' (deictic '*our*' referring to ex-Soviet countries, presupposition that the history was '*common*').

Table 1. Main news story on Belta.by (8.06.2015)

Russian	Belarusian
В Минске проходит X Белорусский международный медиафорум	Лукашэнка: X Беларускі медыяфорум унясе важкі ўклад ва ўмацаванне даверу паміж краінамі Сёлетні форум праводзіцца ў год 70-годдзя Вялікай Перамогі, адзначыў кіраўнік дзяржавы. "Гэта наша агульная гісторыя, якую мы абавязаны ахоўваць і абараняць ад спроб перагляду і фальсіфікацыі, - гаворыцца ў прывітанні. - У той страшнай вайне мы змаглі выстаяць, таму што былі разам. І сёння таксама павінны быць адзіныя ў шчырым імкненні да міру і ўзаемаразумення". "Сродкам масавай інфармацыі, усведамляючы сваю гістарычную адказнасць перад грамадствам, неабходна заняць у гэтых працэсах канструктыўную пазіцыю", - падкрэсліў Прэзідэнт.
Translation into English	
In Minsk, X Belarusian media forum is taking place	Lukashenka: X Belarusian Media forum will contribute greatly to the growth of trust among countries

	<p>This forum is held in the year of the 70th anniversary of the Great Victory, the head of state indicated. ‘This is our common history that we are obliged to protect and defend against attempts to revise and falsify, was said in the greeting. - In that terrible war, we could resist, because we were together. And today we also need to be united in a sincere desire for peace and understanding ‘.</p> <p>‘The media, aware of their historical responsibility before the society, need to take a constructive position in these processes ‘, - underlined the President.</p>
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Additional deictic pronouns ‘*our*’, ‘*we*’ and adverb ‘*together*’ imply ex-Soviet countries-participants of WW2 and reinforce the discourse of sisterhood that is imposed by the government in contrast to the nationalistic stance of the Belarusian-speaking opposition. This can be explained by the fact that alternative media expose unknown facts about the outcomes of WW2; for example, articles ‘*Let’s not forget what Belarus lost in the WW2*’ (Sidarevich 2015), ‘*Top-10 falsifications of the history of war in Belarusian textbooks and official mass media*’ (Studzinskaya 2015) suggest an opposing stance to war events and a different historical truth.

Similarly, on June 9th (see Table 2) the most salient headline presents a political actor, the President. His statement is marked by a passive structure ‘*it will not be forbidden*’ and the agency is deleted. The passive voice is introduced through a transformed indirect quotation and the agent who will not forbid is the President. Agency deletion and passive voice distance the President from the act of ‘non-prohibition’ as if someone else will not prohibit. Although the headline is introduced with the actor’s name, the passive distracts the attention from the agency and makes the statement more impersonal (Billig 2008).

The lead in Belarusian version includes additional political actors linked to the story (Election committee chairman) and direct and transformed quotations from the President’s speech: ‘*we have to fulfil them, as before, in full*’, etc. Here the presidential

elections are labelled as ‘*decent*’ and that it has been so ‘*before*’ which is questionable in Belarus. Obligation modal verbs ‘*have to*’ and ‘*should*’ indicate the categorical stance of the President in succeeding in future elections. The choice of such quotes gives the newsmaker an authoritative voice which might be employed to persuade the readers in Belarusian of the transparency and fairness of election results.

Table 2. Main news story on Belta.by (9.06.2015)

Russian	Belarusian
Лукашенко: в Беларуси никому не будет запрещено наблюдать за президентскими выборами	<p>Лукашэнка: у Беларусі нікому не будзе забаронена назіраць за прэзідэнцкімі выбарамі</p> <p>У Беларусі нікому не будзе забаронена назіраць за прэзідэнцкімі выбарамі. Аб гэтым заявіў сёння кіраўнік дзяржавы Аляксандр Лукашэнка ў час рабочай сустрэчы са старшынёй ЦВК Лідзіяй Ярмошынай, перадае карэспандэнт БЕЛТА. Закранаючы міжнародныя абавязацельствы Беларусі ў час правядзення прэзідэнцкай кампаніі, Аляксандр Лукашэнка падкрэсліў, што "мы іх павінны выканаць, як і раней, спаўна".</p> <p>У час рабочай сустрэчы былі таксама закрануты пытанні фінансавання выбарчай кампаніі. Паводле слоў кіраўніка дзяржавы, лішніх грошай няма, але ўсё павінна быць дастойна, як і раней.</p>
Translation into English	
Lukashenko: in Belarus, it will not be forbidden to anyone to observe the presidential elections	<p>Lukashenko: in Belarus, it will not be forbidden to anyone to observe the presidential elections</p> <p>In Belarus, it will not be forbidden to anyone to observe the presidential elections. About this spoke today the President, Alexander Lukashenko, during a meeting with Chairman of the Central Election Commission Lydia Yermoshina, as Belta correspondent informs. Referring to the international commitments of Belarus during the presidential campaign, Alexander Lukashenko stressed that ‘we have to fulfil them, as before, in full.’</p> <p>During the working meeting, the questions of campaign finance were also touched. According to the President, there is no extra</p>

	money, but everything should go decently, as usual.
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In reporting of Belaruspartisan.org Belarusian language was politicised through a clear difference in rhetoric in news dealing with the conflict in Ukraine. When comparing references to the participating sides of the conflict, the Belarusian version does not mention Russia but over-represents Belarus with 23 occurrences during the days the data was collected. This exemplifies the political stance of Belarusian opposition that recognises Russia’s military involvement in Ukraine and is concerned Belarus might face a similar scenario, a position rejected by the government. In addition, the Belarusian version of the website gave a wider and more salient coverage of this issue than the Russian version which suggests the editorial team believes this topic is of importance to Belarusian language readers. When comparing Ukraine-related news in Russian and Belarusian, different lexical and stylistic choices are made in reporting (see Table 3). In the title, they differ in terms of actors: ‘*Belarusian volunteers*’ and ‘*Ukraine*’ in Russian versus ‘*Volunteers and right-defenders*’ and ‘*Kharkiv people*’ in Belarusian. Albeit succinct, Russian version uses modality and a strong predication (‘*invincible*’) to attribute the actors with impressive characteristics.

Table 3. Emotional language in news on Belaruspartisan.org (10.06.2015)

Russian	Belarusian
<p>Белорусские волонтеры: Украину не победить</p> <p>Волонтеры-правозащитники Дмитрий Колчин и Маргарита Величина, которые в составе "Правозащитной гуманитарной миссии в Украине" оказывают помощь в Харькове переселенцам из зоны боевых действий, поделились своими наблюдениями и размышлениями о ситуации в городе.</p>	<p>Валанцёры-праваабаронцы: Захапляе адзінства, згуртаванасць, неабыхавасць харкаўчан</p> <p>Валанцёры-праваабаронцы, якія ў складзе “Правабарончай гуманітарнай місіі ва Украіне” аказваюць дапамогу ў Харкаве перасяленцам з зоны баявых дзеянняў Зміцер Колчын і Маргарыта Вялічкіна дзяляцца сваімі назіраннямі і развагамі пра сітуацыю ў горадзе, рэфлексіямі наконт спрадвечнага пытання “вайны і міру”, распавядаюць аб трывогах і спадзяваннях простых украінцаў.</p>
Translation into English	
<p>Belarusian volunteers: Ukraine is invincible</p> <p>Volunteers and rights defenders Dmitry Kolchin and Margarita Velichkina, who as part of ‘Human rights and Humanitarian Mission in Ukraine’ in Kharkov assist the displaced from combat zones, shared their observations and reflections on the situation in the city.</p>	<p>Volunteers and rights defenders: The unity, solidarity, non-indifference of Kharkiv people inspires</p> <p>Volunteers and rights defenders Dmitry Kolchin and Margarita Velichkina, who as part of ‘Human Rights and Humanitarian Mission in Ukraine’ in Kharkov assist the displaced from combat zones, shared their observations and reflections on the situation in the city, on the eternal question of ‘war and peace’, talk about anxieties and hopes of ordinary Ukrainians.</p>

In Belarusian, nouns of high expressivity (‘*unity, solidarity, non-indifference*’)

and a mental process (‘*inspire*’) are used to characterise Kharkiv people in a positive light. Furthermore, the object of the article is significantly more poeticised in Belarusian version, e.g.: a metaphor (‘*the eternal question*’) and a metonym (‘*War and Peace*’, a novel by Leo Tolstoy, used here in inverted commas to attribute figurative meaning to the war in Ukraine) give evidence of such effect. The lead goes on to ‘*anxieties and hopes of ordinary Ukrainians*’ which brings readers closer to the people from the story, whilst the simple noun phrase ‘*the situation in the city*’ (Russian version) does not show

similar emotionality. The difference in how the same story is framed in Russian and in Belarusian is striking and may create different perceptions of the event across readers.

In view of non-state financial dependency of Belaruspartisan.org, it is not surprising that news in both languages equally reports on opposition actors. Nevertheless, there is a significant discursive difference in reporting on political events. For example, news on the liberation of political prisoners are frequent in Belarusian but are absent in Russian. A transformed quotation ‘*Makei: Why should Lukashenka free the so-called political prisoners?*’ is not used randomly in the Belarusian version, as this issue has long been a topic of discussion for political opposition, European structures and the government of Belarus. The *why* question undermines the fact that Lukashenka should free the prisoners. The adjective ‘*so-called*’ in the quote emphasises non-recognition of the prisoners being political. However, as the lead suggests, the topic of the article has to do with the ‘*main statements of Vladimir Makei in Riga*’ where a summit took place and mainly with the Belarusian delegation’s disagreement upon signing the Summit’s final declaration. Then, political prisoners are not central to the article and might have been used to attract the attention of those who are concerned with the existence of political prisoners in Belarus.

In Table 4, another piece of evidence confirms differing discourses for news in Russian and Belarusian where the question of Belarus’s foreign policy is presented from different angles.

Table 4. Stylistic differences in political news in Russian and Belarusian on Belaruspartisan.org (10.06.2015)

Russian	Belarusian
Макей: Беларусь никогда не меняла свой внешнеполитический вектор Беларусь рассматривала и будет рассматривать Россию как стратегического партнера.	Беларусь пакуль не гатовая да пагаднення аб асацыяцыі з ЕС Пра гэта міністр замежных спраў Уладзімір Макей заявіў у інтэрв'ю газеце The Washington Post.

Translation into English	
‘Makei: Belarus has never changed its foreign policy vector Belarus has always considered and will consider Russia as a strategic partner.’	Belarus is not yet ready for an association agreement with the EU This was what the Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Makei said in an interview with The Washington Post.

The contrast between the two articles is that partnership with Russia is presented to readers in Russian, whilst for readers in Belarusian the ‘*vector*’ of foreign policy is the EU. Such an angle might be motivated by different views on the course of international politics for Belarus where opinions are divided according to political inclinations that are, in turn, associated with language choice.

Stylistically, in the Russian version, the repetition of the transitive material process verb ‘*consider*’ gives authoritative voice to the statement and suggests stability (‘*has never changed*’), as the verbs are in past and future tenses. As Belarus is a doer in this headline (and it is not Russia who chooses Belarus as a partner), the free choice of ‘*strategic partners*’ is emphasised. Interestingly, readers in Belarusian are exposed to ‘not-readiness’, instead of, for example, ‘not-willingness’, to associate with the EU. It is unclear what Belarus chooses instead of the partnership with the EU either. The examples presented above suggest a link between the language of reporting and the political preference for integration with Russia or the EU, a relationship that has not been established in national surveys (IISEPS 2015), which makes these findings striking.

Languages as cultural markers

The analysis of both websites established a link between languages and culture, the idea that has been central to post-WW2 period nation-building processes (Wright 2003). When examining the culture and culture-related sections of the news, the main finding is that stories’ titles and leads are not identical in Russian and in Belarusian on both

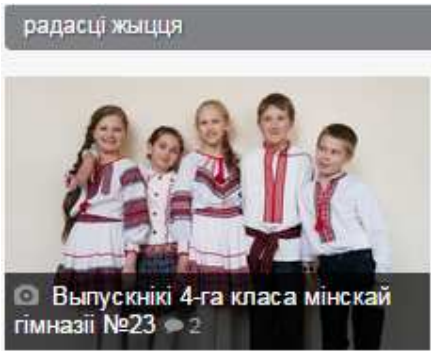
websites. This suggests that readers in Russian get a different set of news on culture than that of their Belarusian-speaking counterparts.

On Belta.by website the culture section offers some interesting thematic choices for language versions. News in Belarusian provides a narrative of a pagan festivity Kupallie and the wooden sculpture showcase, both belonging to folk culture and rural contexts. The Russian version reports on a state-organised festival of national song and poetry and about an Orthodox-Christian icons exhibition. Interestingly, the Russian version also offers readers information on a professional sculptors' display. All of these stories were absent from the Belarusian version of the website.

Such choice of languages to communicate a piece of news reinforces the idea of the Belarusian language being imagined as backward (a feature of the uncivilised culture of the past) and associated with rural areas which, in turn, are seen as underdeveloped and linked to primitive activities (e.g. the elaboration of wooden sculptures). On the other hand, Russian is represented as the language of state-promoted cultural activities while also serving as the language of the Orthodox Church. News in Russian on Belta.by represent a rather globalised version of culture than the local folk cultural variety that the Belarusian version of the website offers.

Belarusian also exercises its symbolic function as a marker of national belonging on pages of Belaruspartisan.org. Figure 2, below, shows a news story where 4th-grade graduates are photographed wearing uniforms with national ornaments. Although the newsworthiness of this story is disputable, it appeared in the Belarusian version of the website four times. This story was, however, absent from the Russian version of the website. This suggests that issues of national identity are expected by readers of news in Belarusian but not by those who choose Russian as the language of the website interface.

Figure 2. News in Belarusian: national symbols in headlines on Belaruspartisan.org (Link: <http://www.belaruspartisan.org/bel/enjoy/306179/>)



In the Russian version, similar salience is given to a piece of news on a Colour Fest which resembles Indian Holi celebrations. This demonstrates how those reading in Russian are imagined as more oriented to a globalised culture whereby Russian as a language provides a bridge to foreign countries. Interestingly, a news-bite on a new TV series about the war in Ukraine also appeared twice in the data pool, but only in the Belarusian version. This links back to the political interests of speakers of Belarusian and the idea of Ukraine as a culturally-close nation to Belarus from their perspective.

In a similar fashion, the sports section demonstrated a greater emotional and national orientation in the Belarusian version of the website. The following news-bites (see Table 5) demonstrate how the effect is achieved through deictic pronouns and tropes:

Table 5. Sports news in Belarusian: deictic pronouns and tropes for ‘ourness’ on Belaruspartisan.org

8 June 2015	9 June 2015
Саўка ды Грышка пра «Рашку, якая адпомсціла Канадзе»	Выкладчык абяцае залік аўтаматам, калі нашы перамогуць канадцаў
Translation into English	
‘Sauka dy Gryshka’ about ‘Russka, who avenged Canada’	The teacher promises to cancel tests if ours win the match against Canadians

Firstly, '*Sauka dy Gryshka*' is a parodic cartoon in Belarusian that mocks one important news story weekly. Here they refer to the Ice Hockey World Cup and the game between Russia and Canada that followed the defeat of the Belarusian team by Canadians. It was expected that Russia would '*avenge*' Belarus and win against the Canadians, but failed to. Then, the headline uses the word Паўка (*Russ-ka* which is a modification of the word Russia with a suffix '-ka') which in this case bears a pejorative and diminutive connotation. '*Avenge*' is a metaphor here as Russia did not really avenge Belarus. Then Belarusian news mock Russia for not being the great rival (through a diminutive suffix) that it is usually believed to be.

In the second headline, the victory against a foreign team is shown as something positive (cancelling tests) and the nationality is marked by a deictic '*ours*' versus the '*Canadians*'. On the other hand, sports news in Russian on Belaruspartisan.org mark nationalities in a more neutral way.

Conclusions

This study set out to explore language representations in Belarus and how they are constructed and reproduced in online news media. This paper has given evidence that digital news media can give different perspectives on the languages in Belarus and their speakers by making particular selections of news stories and rhetorical choices on Belarusian and Russian versions of their websites.

The findings of this study inferred that language stereotypes in Belarusian society are to a large extent displayed on the main pages of news websites. Although no general trend for both of the studied websites was identified, the idea of a language possessing certain characteristics was transmitted on several levels: the structural organisation of web pages, selection of stories and linguistic presentation of events in

headlines and leads. Especially salient were representations of Belarusian as a politicised language and linked to the folk culture of Belarus.

On the other hand, Russian is prioritised at all levels: web pages in Russian contain more stories and they tend to be organised in a more user-friendly manner. This makes Russian a more advanced variety compared to Belarusian, which again reinforces the idea of superiority of the former and uselessness of the latter. This goes in hand with ideas of the greater practicality of Russian, the ideology established mainly during the period of Soviet administration and reinforced by the actual government through covert language policies. What remains unclear is if users' impressions about news in Belarusian and the choice of resources would differ if some parity could be reached on websites in both languages.

Although both languages are used as vehicles of communicating news, the way they are presented to readers suggests that language serves as an indicator of a political inclination: whilst presentation of news in Russian did not demonstrate consistent similarities on both websites, news in Belarusian give more attention to stories related to the Belarusian political opposition, conflict in Ukraine, and human rights defence, all of which suggest a political standpoint of those who are more attached to this language. Inevitably, such associations extrapolate onto the variety itself as Woolard (1998) aptly asserted. This finding corroborates Kulyk's (2011) claims that language identity is a powerful predictor of political preferences.

Although the data presented in this study does not fully represent the cultural realm of contemporary Belarus but rather polarises it across two languages, it gives evidence of how language is tied to culture: Russian seems to be the language of Soviet legacy whilst Belarusian is associated with folk culture. Although this study did not focus on how languages are discussed in the media, such selection of topics represents

languages within the system of ideas of their suitability for different domains. The attachment of languages to cultures is reflected in Belarusian media by the fact that it seems inappropriate to speak about pagan festivities in Russian and about a state-organised music festival in Belarusian.

This research has drawn on many aspects of the sociolinguistic situation in Belarus and the role of digital news in reinforcing language ideologies. Combining critical discourse analysis of headlines and leads with a multimodal analysis has been a fruitful alternative way of looking at language ideologies in multilingual media.

On a final note, I hope that this study shed some light on the media's ability to construct and reproduce language ideologies and demonstrates how, in the Belarusian context specifically, the two languages (Belarusian and Russian) are markers of political, cultural and ideological standpoints in news reporting. Such representations do not seem to suggest a positive change in terms of the meaning that the Belarusian language has for society. Nevertheless, more work still needs to be done in order to better understand representations of languages in Belarusian media, speakers' attitudes towards both varieties and how these affect their language choices. Despite the evidence presented in this study, linguistic confrontation in Belarus remains, along with the question of whether or not languages separate people or if 'one nation' can exist, despite having and speaking 'two languages'.

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